

SOUL CONNECTIONS:

M.A.B.I.S

**Written by**  
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# CHAPTER 1: HEADING TO NEREID

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A world filled with apparent peace, where everyone must connect cybernetically with two other people, may seem perfect. However, what lies beneath the supposed good intentions of some is what will bring ruin to that utopia, the utopia that MABIS has created.

## **JUNE 30, 2323, PORT PHOEBE, SATURN NATION**

The neon lights of the multiple buildings of the port glow. These constructions, several of which resemble corals and squid heads, rest in crystalline waters and are soaked by the light rain in a combusted environment of people coming and going, arriving and departing by means of triangular propeller aircrafts. Flashes, mostly purple and as if they were stars in the firmament, are reflected in the buildings and in the water, water that is spread voraciously from a puddle trampled by the leather boots of Hiromi Solari, a former mercenary who has returned to the rebel lines after a long time.

Fierce looking, yet with some compassion, Hiromi makes his way over the immense bridge of Phoebe's The Road of Roads. In his mouth, with a scruffy and slightly wet beard, he holds a cigarette that has small blue, red and purple lights, which flicker. His gaze is lost in the firmament, but, beyond admiring it, his mind is gone, clouded, just like the horizon. As he ascends a ramp of triangular patterns with dagger-like spikes, he thinks about everything that has brought him there. Back with the rebels? Being the head of a mission? A mission that could decide the entire rebel future? However, there is another thought that plunges him even deeper, Karaya.

Hair in frizzy curls that tangle anyone, man or woman, rich or poor, prosystem or rebel; dark complexion that makes everybody remember wonderful cultures already extinct in this world dominated by uncertainty and the desire to forget past errors; and freckles like stars that drown everyone in the immensity of the universe, Karaya always comes to Hiromi's mind. "If only I had gone with her, none of that would've happened" he thinks and thinks every moment even though it's just that, a thought. The past cannot be changed.

The ex-mercenary sighs heavily and lets out a puff of orange smoke. He contemplates his cigarette in which the lights are slowly dying and decides to throw it in a nearby trash can. He finally reaches the fourth floor of The Road

of Roads, where there's a sign that reads: "Level 4 - Towards Neptune (Despina, Proteus, Sao, Nereid)". The noise of the transport pod thrusters and the sound of people talking and walking becomes even more noticeable. Maybe it's better for him. They distract him from his mental imprisonments that are even more pervasive than those of MABIS.

Now, Solari is attentive. His beautiful, yet tired, slanted brown Asian eyes watch warily and cautiously. In the distance, he sees plasma fields appear and disappear. They're security barriers that people cross to make their way to Neptune, the "red" nation, famous for its military forces, film industry and landscapes brought from other worlds thanks to its brutalist and High-Tech imposing architecture.

Hiromi presses a button on a thin bracelet on his right wrist and a small holographic screen projects from it. He scrolls through several contact panels and selects one. The holography is hidden and he adjusts a grayish earpiece in his ear. He hears a tone.

- Yaihex? - Asks the rebel cautiously. On the other end of the call, someone clears their voice and laughs very lightly.

- Hiromi, what a surprise! My favorite rebel calling. - Yaihex with his obvious sarcastic tone. Solari does nothing but smile. - I was just about to call you to see how you were doing, champ. - The hound continues his game of satire. - To find out if you weren't arrested and executed by the MABIS authorities. - While receiving the usual talk from the rebel leader, the ex-mercenary checks an inside pocket of his leather jacket. From there he takes out some circular microchips, looks at them and puts them back in.

- I'm in Phoebe. I'm going to Nereid. - Solari explains to Yaihex. In the distance, there are several patrols guarding the area and talking to other people while checking information on holographic screens.

- I assumed you'd start your mission after the MABIS party. These days security gets heavier. - Yaihex says in a serious tone.

- Yes, but that security is focused on Triton. That's where the party is. Nereid's not a priority, so it's easier to get there. - Hiromi takes out a pack of cigarettes and grabs one that has the same colors as the previous one. He lights it and the tiny lights start to flicker.

- Okay, you're the expert in transportation, in moving, in fleeing... so, I imagine you already have your MABIS simulation chip in place, don't you? - Yaihex states in a subtly accusatory tone. Solari exhales a puff of orange smoke.

- Without it, I couldn't pass the security barriers. You know I'm not connected to MABIS, like you, like any of us. -

- I know that. Just remember that... -

- You need these chips to do your thing against the system. Yes, I'm clear on that. I hand them out to your forces on Neptune and Jupiter and, in return, you help me find Karaya's killers. That's the deal, isn't it? - For a brief moment Hiromi's gaze is lost in the horizon again. He's rapt in the panorama.

- "You are straightforward with your commissions. I just hope you don't get blinded by anger before the time comes to do it, mercenary. - Solari sighs, puffs on his cigar and blows out another puff of smoke. He clears his throat.

- And rebel. -

- Hopefully for your own ideals. If you hadn't deserted, you know you'd be in my position... - The intercom is embraced by a silence that seems to deafen the other rumblings coming from outside. - ... But I will not allow weak hearts in my ranks, so rethink what you're doing... - Another silence takes over the space and, why not, the time. The ex-mercenary gives another taste of his vice and lets out the smoke that gives him no clue as to how to respond to these harsh statements. He closes his eyes as if meditating, opens them and throws the cigarette to the ground. He steps on it.

- I'll try... -

- Good! See you in Nereid, until then. Ah! I forgot. I'll be a little late getting there. Enjoy the city while I'm there. - Hiromi's earpiece beeps. Yaihex ends the call. Or rather, he cuts it off. Hiromi looks at the horizon and his countenance is both serious and melancholic. Suddenly, a loud noise sounds behind the rebel.

- Stop him, he's a rebel! - Exclaims the voice of a patrolman. Hiromi's eyes widen in shock and for a moment he thinks they mean him. However, he regains his composure and turns to look at what has happened. He sees several boxes lying on the ground from which several artifacts and clothes are sticking out. Not far from him, Solari notices several patrol officers chasing a young man in shabby clothes. Several of those present also observe the situation in an uneasy manner and muttering to those close to them.

The former mercenary begins to deeply detail the chaos and the chase. His instinct and avidity align. He must do something. Whether the boy is in the rebel lines or not, he can't let them catch him because they'll force him to connect to MABIS and that, that's like losing the battle against the system. The man with slanted eyes touches his right flank and frowns. He doesn't want to get into trouble just when he's about to set off for Neptune, but duty and the debt he owes won't let him leave just like that. So he starts to run in the direction of the rebellious boy. One of the patrolmen pulls out a plasma gun and aims it at the fleeing young man, but Hiromi crosses his sights. The officer decides to lower the gun and is amazed by Solari's speed and the way he moves, who catches up with the boy in no time. The officer turns to see a

fellow patrolman and realizes that he has also become immersed in the magnificence of the ex-mercenary.

As soon as Hiromi reaches the boy, he lunges at him and they both fall to the ground. Solari sits on top of him and immobilizes him; strength and weight generate a blockage from which he cannot get out. The rebel who is now confined to the floor looks at the ex-mercenary with fearful eyes and his breathing is agitated. It's as if his soul is trying to escape from his body. However, his hopelessness is somewhat diluted when the insurgent imprisoning him winks at him.

- Idiot, idiot, listen to me well and you can escape. - Hiromi quietly and discreetly assures the terrified boy, who nods. - When those officers get here, you're going to..." -

After a moment, the two patrolmen arrive, already at a slow pace, thinking that Hiromi has stopped the threat, but the pursued rebel throws Solari aside, grabs him by his shirt and lifts him up. With his arm he encircles and squeezes the experienced man's neck. He also places the muzzle of a revolver to the man's temple, an action that generates fear and discomfort for both the common people and the officers, who back up a little.

- Listen up! If you make any suspicious moves, I'll blow this asshole's brains out, eh... - The rebellious boy hesitates and starts looking in different directions while trying to think of what else he should say.

- Bondmates... - Mentions Hiromi between teeth. The boy opens his eyes in understanding and refocuses his gaze on the patrolmen.

- And you know what will happen to his bondmates if he dies! - The men and women watching the situation are terrified. They make expressions of anguish and distress.

Both rebels, one as the prey and the other as the predator, though in cahoots for their own good, begin to retreat at the younger man's movements. Likewise, his gaze penetrates one of the agents, as he holds up a gun.

- Hey, you! - The boy shouts in obfuscation as he has been doing a moment ago. - The one with the gun, drop it. Or do you want to see red all over this miserable place? - The officer with the gun looks at him defiantly. - Aren't you going to do it? - He slowly presses even harder on Hiromi's temple with the muzzle of the revolver and starts to retract the index finger that abuts the trigger to activate the barrel.

- Hold on! - the patrolman yells. He drops the gun and it falls to the ground. Both rebels continue backing away, but everything seems to be orchestrated by the young man who threatens Solari's life.

- If anyone follows me, I'll blow the guts out of whoever it is. - The boy releases the ex-mercenary and runs at full speed out of The Road of Roads.

All the people who witnessed the conflict discreetly move away from the direction of the young rebel. The patrolman with the weapon approaches Hiromi.

- Sorry, officer, I tried to stop him, but I didn't know he had a revolver. - Solari says with shame and shrewdness.

- Don't worry. Sooner or later that bastard will be caught anyway, but for now we must let him go. We couldn't let him hurt anyone. - This patrolman bends down and picks up the gun he threw away. He turns back to Hiromi. - Sir...?

- Solari. - The rebel answers, startled a little.

- It was a noble attempt, Mr. Solari. Thank you for your bravery. - Hiromi gives him an empty smile. The officer puts away his weapon, adjusts his uniform and makes a bow to the man who serves as his adversary, even enemy. - Bon voyage. - Solari smiles coldly again and the man of authority leaves. He's followed by other officers. In turn, Solari takes course for the transport pods further in the distance.

- Fortunately, that guy was able to escape. He wasn't connected to MABIS, but he wasn't one of us either. If he were, he'd already have the simulation chip. All Saturn rebels are supposed to have it by now. - The ex-mercenary muses. Hiromi stands in one of the queues leading to the security barriers to take the transport to Nereid. These rows are guarded by only one officer. The others seem to be grouped together discussing the recent incident.

Each individual places his or her left wrist on holographic scanners that analyze it by means of a white glow. Once scanned and with a green approval light, the plasma fields dissipate for a brief moment and each person passes the security boundary with the goal of boarding a purple airship that will take them to the great military nation, where the red of blood and passion will burn soon. The new, but returning rebel arrives on the scanner. Like everyone else, he places his left wrist there to be rigorously analyzed. With a confident demeanor, but no doubt with some inward anxiety, Hiromi averts her gaze as the scanning process ends.

A green light is projected and the plasma security barrier disappears. Hiromi sighs in relief and passes. Then, he enters one of the transport vehicles. He sits near a huge window and appreciates the faint rain that still continues to dampen the atmosphere. Also, he's lost for a moment in the grandeur of those vast metal and glass structures with marine shapes that cover the entire Phoebe port. However, he comes out of his trance and feels the right side of his hip. There's nothing there. He smiles slightly and makes a gesture that denotes a bit of disappointment and pride at the same time. Now he has to get another weapon.

He then raises his left arm and looks at his wrist. There's the MABIS symbol: three horizontal lines with three small circles above and three long triangles below, which touch at the tips. The symbol glows softly in neon purple. In his case, it's a fake one. It wasn't made by MABIS, but by the simulation chip to circumvent the system. And that's his mission, to deliver the chips to the rebels of Neptune and Jupiter so that all the anti-system can move freely between those three nations that are now only left on Earth, but will it be easy?

# CHAPTER 2: GRADUATION AT GREAT RED STAIN

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**JULY 01, 2323, GANYMEDE, JUPITER NATION**

Majestic gardens with marble statues of gold details make way for elegantly dressed families, who attend the graduation of the Great Red Stain School's youth and, as it must be by state regime, in addition to graduation, connection to MABIS.

- MABIS, the meta-connection and body interconnection system was born 130 years ago. - With captivating blue eyes and a beard like a Greek god, Devdoot, the school's director, explains the history of MABIS to everyone attending the event in Great Red Stain's spacious auditorium. The man stands on a stage and faces an audience, which is divided in two in the large hall, on one side the family members of the graduates and on the other the students in caps and gowns.

By means of a huge holographic screen at the back of the place, a video is projected in which a lab can be seen as well as three experimental subjects who have white lights emitted from under the skin on their necks. From these glows, several luminous ramifications, also white, spread out in all directions of the body as if they were veins.

- In trios, this is how we connect to each other and to MABIS. We forge a physical and mental bond with other people. - The director expounds. Those present watch the video in which the left wrists of the individuals are now visible in which whitish threads glow within the skin and are connected to the neck and spine. - By means of the nervous and muscular system. And of course, thanks to a lot of training, which they received these last three years here at Great Red Stain; all this so that the body is able to withstand the load and improvements of MABIS. - Devdoot proudly mentions.

The experimental subjects in the video fight in training. They give and receive powerful punches and kicks. They also dodge and jump with unique agility. The children in the auditorium are amazed to see such maneuvers in the footage. - Physical and mental improvements. - Devdoot says, focused on his audience and not on the video, as he has seen those moves a thousand times before. Then, on the tape, Eiclan Acsys appears, a gray-haired, vigorous man in a white lab coat. He gently grasps the hand of one of the experimental subjects.

- But beyond purely bodily and intellectual enhancement, scientist Eiclan Acsys wanted something else when he created MABIS. He wanted us to be



united as humanity, to be more empathetic so that.... - The director gives a brief pause and a sidelong glance at the recording without turning his head too much. Immediately a depressing atmosphere appears in the video. A dull, cloudy day, with smoke in the sky. Several buildings can be seen, like skyscrapers, half destroyed. Ruins of buildings, rubble, broken walls, destroyed pavement and more devastation engulf the images. Devdoot sighs.

-... So that chaos would not take over the world again. - The man laments. On the tape, there are now several dead birds and others writhing in pain. Likewise, there are corpses of people lying on the ground. Their wrists are pale. There are no marks on them. Perhaps a sign of freedom in those times gone by, but a freedom that came at a very high price. - That's why we adopted MABIS after the world catastrophe when we were rebuilding ourselves as a society. - Devdoot now states in a more animated tone.

All the destruction disappears and, instead, there is now a city full of neon lights in which flying and non-flying vehicles are crossing each other in a central traffic circle as they move forward. - The great nations accepted MABIS without hesitation. -

The images of the city change to a military training camp and a huge title occupies the screen that reads, "NEPTUNE". This proceeds to fade out to show hand-to-hand combat by soldiers in short-sleeved, grayish-hued T-shirts. The MABIS symbol glows and flickers red on the wrists of the combatants. - Fiery-blooded like the color of its flag, Neptune is one of these prosperous nations. -

Following this, the video changes to a raging concert with purple lights and a faint rain that enhances the festive illumination. Joy and dance is transpired by the young people present at the concert; their gazes are focused on the artists dancing and singing on the stage in the background. The screen is occupied by a large sign: "SATURN". This title disappears and the graduation attendees now see a research center. There are several scientists, who check the wrists of several patients and these have the MABIS symbol flashing purple.

- Saturn, the mother nation, the original territory, where MABIS was created. Its flag is permeated with an intense purple color that reminds us of the magic and wisdom with which this place spawned our wonderful system. - Devdoot babbles a little more about this new world. - And... -

In the footage, a beautiful clear blue sky is seen through a large window, complemented by sleek, modern, futuristic buildings. The sunlight soaks them and flashes caused by the sun's rays hitting the glass panes blind from time to time. "JUPITER", the text takes over the screen, but it doesn't take long to fade away as the video ends. - Jupiter! - The director mentions with a

slightly smug tone. He raises his fists, shaking them vigorously and excitedly. The MABIS symbol is glowing blue on his wrist. - Our great nation, defined by the color of the sky that gives us hope. Today we celebrate the efforts of these youth in this special event, their graduation and, of course, connection to MABIS, which we will be initiating shortly. -

Standing in rows of three next to those who will be their bond mates, Ratree, with a tender face, slanting Asian eyes and innocent appearance, Jia, with elegant posture, sensual attitude and great beauty, and Claes, with a serious countenance, serene air and penetrating gaze, are in the first place. The three of them watch the director as he gives the usual words. Devdoot grips the microphone in his hand tighter and his expression becomes serious. His look penetrates the uniformed people. - Guys, I know you're young and at that age we love to experience different... - He hesitates. -... Things, but remember that rebellious ideas have never benefited us. Please don't let them attract you. -

Family and friends of the graduates look at each other and nod at the words of the man on the stage. - Remember, guys. MABIS provides us with security, unity and true company. - Devdoot closes his eyes for a very brief moment, sighs deeply, and then smiles. - Let's get started! - The headmaster points with his hand to the young people in the last row at the back. Some of the other students look back to detail who will be the first to connect to MABIS. The boys in that spot get up and make their way to the raised platform where Devdoot is standing. - Remember to save the applause for last. - The man mentions to the audience.

When the first graduates pass near the front seats, Claes observes them with intrigue, although it will soon be his turn, at the end of the ceremony, together with Jia and Ratree. Curiously, the boy watches them as they walk up the wide, but not very long, crystal steps leading to the stage. Their gowns glide down these neat steps as if they were caressing them. Once they arrive at the site, Devdoot gives them a big handshake and smiles at them, more out of protocol than genuine action.

The boys make a military formation facing the public, waiting for the Ambassadors, MABIS servants for the making of the connections, who wear extravagant tunics in the colors of each nation and the symbol of the system on the abdomen. Soon, these people arrive on the left side of the boys and carry a bulky bracelet each. After a short, cold bow as a greeting, they proceed to place the devices on the left arm, covering the wrist area. Without having looked them in the eyes yet, the Ambassadors press a button on the bracelets and a small translucent thread comes out of it. Each boy is connected to this thread under the nape of their neck, in the spinal cord, an action that causes them pain, for which they make a moaning sound, but no

one is surprised by this, as they had already received all the information about the MABIS connection.

The servants press another button on the device and now it lights up with a bright white light. They then move to the back of the stage. One of the Ambassadors begins to review information on a holographic screen on which vital signs are visible. He looks at the students.

- Connection twenty-three twenty-three Jupiter three zed zero one, activated! - As the Ambassador says this, he presses a box on the screen. The bracelets light up even more, too much so that some of the attendees look away from such a disproportionate flash. The eyes of those now connected go white for a brief moment and their bodies jolt, producing a spasm in their backs and arms.

Jia, in the front row, flinches a little from the shock of seeing the boys. She turns to look at Claes, who is deep in concentration watching the show. His blue eyes show ardor and passion for what he is witnessing. His smile makes him seem amazed. Jia gives a soft sigh and looks at Ratree, who is on her other side. He looks at the stage as well, but quickly notices Jia's gaze, to which he reacts and turns to look at her. They both smile at each other.

- They prepare us for three years for this, but I don't feel ready. - The girl says with a bit of dissatisfaction.

- I don't think anyone really is. - Ratree replies to calm her down a bit. However, coming out of his trance, Claes pays attention to them and gives them a sidelong glance, although he continues to look towards the stage.

- The only ones who are not prepared are the rebels. - Claes mentions in a slightly cocky manner. Jia's expression of sobriety mixed with nervousness changes to one with a mild tone of anger and annoyance. Looking straight ahead, though realizing his mistake, Claes' eyes widen further in concern and light embarrassment. Meanwhile, Ratree stares at them in confusion. - I was just... -

- Joking, sure, Claes. I know. These three years I've gotten to know you, but you don't seem to know me. - Jia expresses, to which the boy frowns in bewilderment. - I was joking too. - She expresses now in a playful tone and gives Claes a small pat on the shoulder, to which the young man sighs in relief. Ratree laughs faintly at the whole situation. The two involved look at him and smile warmly.

- Ever since I met them three years ago, there's always tension between them when they talk about rebels. - Ratree muses to himself.

Time passes and the other young people go through their MABIS connection process, in trios. Jia's honey-colored eyes flash by the auditorium lights and watch each of the graduates make their way to the big platform. They make a squad formation on the stage once they are connected. In this

back and forth of people, she calms down and begins to feel less anxious about the whole procedure. Sooner rather than later, she realizes that it is now her turn, as there is no one in the ranks behind her.

The bracelets are removed from the penultimate group to be connected and Devdoot turns to look at the guys still seated, Jia, Claes and Ratree. He smiles at them and brings the microphone up to his mouth.

- Now we move on to the last trio, Claes, Ratree and Jia! - The academy director exclaims and the trio of friends gets ready to go to the center of the stage. - The three of them will represent the Great Red Stain school at the big MABIS Re-unioM party. They deserved to go because they got the best results in the physical and academic tests. - As the remaining students climb the glass stairs, the attendees scrutinize them with proud eyes, wanting to give them an ovation, but not doing so because of the principal's instructions to applaud until the end. Ivo, Claes' little brother sitting next to his mother in the middle of the crowd, watches them with immense joy. Once the three of them reach the stage, Devdoot gives them a firm handshake and a smile, which seems genuine this time.

- Tomorrow night is Re-unioM. We're counting on you to enjoy yourselves and behave accordingly. - The man recommends to the guys and they nod quietly. Then they go to the center of the platform and without wasting a second, the Ambassadors place the bracelets on their left wrists and the translucent threads under the nape of their necks. They wince a bit at that last connection, but look at each other, smile and nod.

- Connection twenty-three twenty-three Jupiter three zed two four, activated! - One of the Ambassadors shouts and presses a button on his holographic screen. The young fellows have a spasm in their bodies and their eyes light up white.

Now, Ratree, Jia and Claes are immersed in a blank space. Where are they? An ethereal space of MABIS? Maybe. their memories? Maybe. In nothingness? Maybe.

The buddies look at each other, puzzled. Suddenly, they hear a gunshot sound and a violent bullet hits Ratree's shoulder. He falls to the ground with a crash. Jia gets disturbed and rushes over to the boy. Claes freezes in terror. He is remembering something he has always wanted to forget.

Suddenly, flames appear and impregnate Claes and Ratree. Right now, Jia is the one who wears a disturbed expression. The fire ignites her mind and begins to corrode her. Memories of loss attack her mercilessly and her breath catches. She wants to flee the place, but also to stay. The heat of the moment chokes her, but her loved ones are there. She cannot leave.

The flames fade from Ratree. They intensify on Claes and his face begins to melt though. Ratree, stunned, sees this image and, like his friends, begins

to relive situations from his past. Blindness, suffocation, pain, identity?, brotherhood?, everything seems to imprison him as his face does from time to time when he remembers that night.

After all the chaos, a beep deafens this fantasy. They appear standing in the same blank space, but without any wounds. They are fine. So it seems. They look at each other again, now dumbfounded and a little perturbed.

- What was all that? - Claes asks as he surveys the scene. - What's this? - Ratree, speechless, just shakes his head. Jia closes her eyes and sighs deeply.

- It must be a hallucination from the connection, but we're fine. - Jia softens the confusion with her words. On the left wrist of each of the guys, now, the MABIS symbol is, which flickers with blue light. They look at it with an uneasy expression, a mixture of satisfaction and suspicion.

The buddies' minds turn back to the Great Red Stain School auditorium. Their bodies shake and their eyes widen. They look at each other and, unable to react any differently, smile. The Ambassadors reach them and disconnect the devices from both wrist and neck. Once the servants leave, as if planned by Jia and Claes, the friends do a group hug that takes Ratree by surprise. The other graduates stare at them in amazement.

- And that's why they're the perfect trio. They show what MABIS is all about, love, friendship, family, connection. - Devdoot says to his entire audience, referring to this latest threesome. Immediately, the guys go into formation with the others and the school principal stands in the middle of everyone. He looks at them and raises the microphone. - Congratulations, folks! On your graduation and MABIS connection. - Now, his gaze turns to the crowd. - Now you can applaud. - All the people, family members and the newly connected, clap spiritedly.

A voice, elsewhere, utters the words that will herald an intricate future for this flawless trio. - He'll get that rebel chip from a girl who just graduated named Jia. -

# CHAPTER 3: A REBEL MISSION

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**JULY 01, 2323, TRITON, NEPTUNE NATION**

The night, apparently calm, allows Zorine's movements to glide stealthily through a harbor full of crates and containers. The moon barely provides the place with light and several distant posts give a glimpse of the combat posture of the Neptune soldier. Her furtive gaze and torn, grayish uniform hint at the battle that will soon take place, as well as the past ones. She senses movement, withdraws and hides a little. She leans her back against one of the crates, but doesn't delay in slinking closer than she noticed a moment ago. However, something distracts her, a thought. She lifts her left wrist and looks at it. There it has the MABIS symbol, which glows faintly red.

Suddenly, there appears in front of her, albeit in the distance, a man in tattered clothes, who begins to run straight in her direction. Seeing this defiant action, Zorine braces herself and, just before the attacker arrives, she jumps on top of a crate, from which she takes momentum to deliver a powerful kick to the man, although he manages to dodge it. They both look at each other. The fight is on. Punches, collisions and impacts with severity on the part of both are hit, dodged and blocked. It's a pretty even fight until Zorine decides to get serious and give it her all. She sighs to give way to a red look of ferocity and a dry smile of confidence.

With swift movements and just like a ghost, she catches up to the man without him noticing. And when he does, it is too late to react. Zorine delivers three accurate blows, two to the ribs and one to the skull. However, without detracting from the man's skill, he is able to slap her in the face, an action for which the soldier recoils. Without letting him take any more advantage, she bends down and with her instep hits one of his calves, causing him to fall to the ground.

Abruptly, she directs her foot straight at his opponent's face, but he rolls on the ground and avoids the impact. Demonstrating his dexterity as well, he gets up and recomposes himself in a jiffy. They land a couple more blows, but soon she ducks, dodges one of the attacks, grabs her opponent's arm, bends it and breaks it. He screams, but Zorine doesn't give him a chance. She continues to beat him, and he is tremendously outclassed. Once she has the overwhelming advantage, she pulls out a small dagger from a case on her left side and buries it in the neck of the subjugated, now defeated man in a devastating way.

Some blood begins to stain the ground and a lifeless body falling heavily splashes it around. More red tinge soils the surface and reaches Zorine's boots. She puts away her dagger, now bloodied. Despite the recent victory, the young woman becomes alert again. Two boys, one in a blue uniform and the other in a purple one, approach her hastily and dangerously. The military lady decides to run in the opposite direction and jumps back onto one of the crates. She takes a deep thrust and somersaults backwards in the air. She lands on her feet and behind her new opponents.

Her countenance challenges the uniformed men. To get one of them off her hands, she kicks him in the ribs, which sends him flying, and then leaves him far away on the ground. The one in the blue clothes starts to fight her and they both punch each other vigorously. However, this new adversary is less fierce than the first one, so she does not take long to hit him with a powerful fist in his stomach, which makes him move away. At that, the one who was on the ground gets up and goes to her.

In an accelerated movement, Zorine grabs the waist and arm of the boy she is fighting, lifts him up and throws him to the other. They both fall to the ground like punching bags. From the pouches on either side of her hip and her arms as if on X's, Zorine pulls out two daggers, one clean and one bloody. Despite the combatants' ineffectual attempt to get up, the military female bends down, turns around, her back to them, and stabs them in the chest at the same time. She removes the stabs and the boys fall slumped to the ground. She sighs and stands up. The victorious woman shakes her head in denial and gives a sidelong glance at the vanquished.

- They took me by surprise. I didn't think two would come at the same time. - The girl muses to herself. Then she touches a black ring on her left hand and a holographic screen pops up. At the bottom right, she selects a button that says: "Simulation". "Finish" and "Restart" are her new options, from which she chooses "Finish". Just at this moment, the nighttime, inhospitable scenery changes as does her worn-out suit.

The entire floor turns orange. The crates and containers change to the same shade and the men lying on the ground to reddish androids. The dismal scene full of blood is no longer like this and any trace of death fades away. It is daylight and, through a glass dome that covers the whole place, the radiant sun is present. Likewise, outside the dome, beautiful and living nature surrounds the environment, which leaves Zorine absorbed in that grandeur for a brief moment. This environment reflects and resembles the girl's emerald green eyes. Both glow from the daylight.

Once her daily morning training is over, the soldier leaves this simulation dome and begins to walk through the open-air corridors of this barracks, called Astras. As she walks and appreciates the flowers outside, she hears

some footsteps not far behind her, so she turns to look at who it is, with an apparent tranquility, but being very alert as she always is. Seeing the person behind, the girl smiles with legitimate excitement.

It is Sylvanne Winpou, one of the two generals of the entire Neptune army, of dark complexion, tall in stature, who with her bearing and presence intimidates enemies and comforts friends in equal parts. Her uniform is dyed an aggressive red with some black lines. She smiles back at Zorine and approaches her subordinate.

- How have you been, General Winpou? - The woman asks for such an unexpected arrival, to which Sylvanne raises her eyebrows in slight confusion.

- For you, Sylvanne, Miss Morel. - The general recommends.

- How have you been, General Sylvanne? - Zorine replies with a slightly teasing tone, to which Winpou sighs laughingly.

- Just Sylvanne, without the "general", and I've been very well. - They both laugh faintly. Winpou begins to walk forward, a march that Morel joins her.

- What's the reason for your coming, Sylvanne? -

- I was coming to visit you, my dear. - Zorine's expression shows a bit of bewilderment. - And to give you a mission for tomorrow. - The girl's misplacement goes away, but another concern comes to her. What kind of undertaking will she be entrusted with? - It's for MABIS. You're going to be the security coordinator for the Re-unioM party which, as you know, is being held tomorrow here in Triton. And who better than a soldier who lives here? Of course, besides being more than qualified for the task. - The girl is glad for such words. - General Sokoli put Frank to help you, so you have to be attentive to him and other subordinates of his. -

- I understand, but if it's only the security of the party, there would be no problem with him... -

- No. There would be a problem. - Zorine's mind fills with intrigue again. - That's not the only order I have for you. There's also a rebellious one. - Sylvanne looks away from her companion and observes the nature, an act that the other girl imitates and both are bathed by the sun's rays. They admire the view for a moment and Winpou turns back to her subordinate, who also turns to look at her. - Well, the main mission isn't yours. It's Bonnat's... - As soon as Morel hears this name, her expression drops its subtle seriousness and changes to one of pleasure, so that her superior arches her eyebrows in wonder and interrogation.

- I haven't seen Gunnar for a while. - Zorine says, letting out a tender smile.

- Obviously, I talk to him. He's, after all, my bondmate, but.... -



- I admire how fond you are of your MABIS connections, but remember that we must not tie ourselves to anything in the system. As rebels, it's the last thing we should do. Luckily, Bonnat's on our side, but if he weren't... -

- I know. I'm sorry. It's just that... Anyway, what's the assignment? - Sylvanne places her hand on Zorine's shoulder to give her some comfort over the very words she used to create that tension.

- Bonnat will go to the party as part of the internal security, which will be camouflaged as regular assistants. He'll receive there a chip with important information from Jupiter rebels. You must keep an eye on the other military personnel inside so that he goes as unnoticed as possible when he's going to receive the chip. - Morel nods to the orders and her gaze returns to admire the panorama full of flowers. Winpou follows her this time.

- Who will he receive it from? -

- He's getting that rebel chip from a girl who just graduated, named Jia. –

# CHAPTER 4: LIVES IN THE SYSTEM

## **JULY 01, 2323, GANYMEDE, JUPITER NATION**

Living souls walk through the Nuestro Destino cemetery. This place is vast, several stories high, and covered, although it has large windows that provide it with a great amount of light. Grass, flowers and, clearly, graves fill the place. Shortly after graduation at Great Red Stain, Claes along with his little brother Ivo and his mother Riv visit this place. They descend to the first level by means of a semi-crystalline elevator. As soon as they get there, they breathe the air of a glowing environment with a soothing silence, unlike the other floors that drown out any thoughts with their bustle.

Without worries and contemplating all the beauty there, Claes walks. He lets himself be embraced by the warm energy of the souls resting in this place. Well, more than souls, the memory and legacy they have left behind. Once the boy reaches his destination, he crouches down and leaves some poppy flowers next to a tombstone that reads: "Loving father, exemplary husband and honorable soldier. A man who fought against evil deserves glory and much more." Underneath it reads, "Reda Long, 2262 - 2314." With his knees on the ground, Claes looks at the epitaph with melancholy. - How I wish you were here. - The boy thinks and sighs a little despondently.

On the grave beside him, pink magnolia flowers are placed by Ivo. On that tombstone reads: "Dedicated father and husband. A human being who filled the hearts of everyone around him. And just below it is written: "Kanu Raga, 2268 - 2320". The young recent graduate Claes Long and his younger brother Ivo Raga look at each other and smile. They both stand up and the older one grabs the little kid's waist, whom he sits on his shoulders. Then they turn to look at their mother, who stands behind them and observes the situation with sweetness.

- Reda would be very proud of such a son. - Riv mentions to Claes for encouragement, and the woman's words bring out a more animated expression on the boy's face. Then she takes one of Ivo's hands gently. - And Kanu would be more than happy to see how his son loves his older brother so much. - A grin from ear to ear takes shape on the little boy's face. The older one with the child on his shoulders takes a slight trot that thrills this charismatic passenger, but after a moment he lightens his pace and Riv joins them. - So... - The newly connected boy looks at his mother. - You're going to join the army, aren't you? - She asks with a slightly distressed tone. He

sighs and looks up at one of the windows on the roof. He loses himself a little in the light.

- Yes, Mom. I don't wanna waste a second. - Claes says earnestly, but also with some gloom.

- You know. I only have you two. I don't want anything to happen to you. - The elderly lady gazes at her sons, those young faces that always provide her with energy. Claes feels the heaviness of his mother's words and emotions, so he stares at the ground for a moment. He closes his eyes, sighs and then looks at her.

- It's my obligation. I can't let the same thing happen as happened to my dad. - Riv nods with a bit of disappointment and sadness. The boy's mind wanders again, showing pain and sorrow. - If only the rebels didn't exist. - He reasons to himself. However, he comes out of his brooding reverie when Ivo gives him a hug and a kiss on the head. He is cheered by his brother's action and raises his left wrist to see the MABIS symbol glowing blue there.

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With a facade of neutral colors, elegant and soberly illuminated, the Sai restaurant makes its sophistication visible at all times. Luxurious cars arrive and leave slowly and quietly, contrasting with those on the main road, which are in full speed. People in chic dresses and suits enter and depart the facility. The interior of the place is clad in cool, dim lights. The tables and decorations appear to be of the most expensive and harmonious.

Around a perfectly arranged rectangular table with several plates of food already to be finished, there are various young people and adults, among them Ratree, Alisa and James. People are eating, drinking, talking, laughing and smiling. Ratree, however, seems to be distracted and lost from any conversation or event that is happening there. His gaze reaches a triangular patterned window through which the outside is visible, pedestrians passing streets, traffic lights that change color and neon-lit vehicles, some with strange, though original, designs.

Alisa touches Ratree's shoulder and he startles slightly. He turns to look at her and she gives him a tender expression, to which he smiles, but his eyes turn to the plate in front of him, which is empty. He sighs and moves closer to Alisa, to her ear. She is receptive.

- I'm going for a walk. - The boy tells her in a very low voice. She looks out the windows.

- It looks like it's going to rain. Be careful. - The woman indicates affectionately. James turns to look at them and Ratree smiles at him. Alisa moves closer to the man. - Ratree is going for a walk. - He nods and winks at the young man. On his side, the boy gets up from the seat and heads for the exit. James beholds him with some dismay, but one of his tablemates taps

him on the shoulder, he averts his gaze from Ratree and talks to the others there, though, sure enough, his face shows boredom after a moment.

On the way to the outside, he stops for a moment and looks at a fish tank in the distance. The fish inside have different colors and are all on their own, except for two of the same color that swim together. Ratree's attention is focused on them and he remembers sadly. He turns his gaze to the ground and continues on his way out.

In addition to the firmament and clouds, the windows of the imposing buildings and the reflections in the puddles are tinged with a pinkish orange by the sunset, although it is overshadowed by dense clouds that begin to fill the sky. Fine cars and motorcycles speed through the streets as the traffic light remains green. People talking and walking on the sidewalks, as well as huge neon signs full of advertising and entertainment, bring the scene to life. Yet despite this liveliness, as if isolated from everyone and everything, Ratree walks and looks at others. He stops and observes a small playground where he sees several children playing.

The boy's mind wanders back several years into the past. Among those glimpses and flashes that occupy his consciousness, a garden of red and pink flowers appears. There, two children run, laugh and play, but their faces, for some reason, seem indistinguishable.

Return to the now, Ratree averts his eyes and starts walking again. He has no direction. A small drop of water falls on his face, so he sees the sky where the thick cloud cover is. Immediately, more drops fall and, suddenly, a torrential rain ruins the boy's peaceful walk. Several people take out umbrellas, others start to run, and the last few get under nearby roofs. Meanwhile, Ratree sees a covered bus stop in the distance and moves up there at a brisk pace, without being overly anxious. He gets there a little wet and sits down on a bench.

Mel sits next to him, a boy about his own age, soft looking, tall in stature and of a slim build. He smiles at Ratree and the soaked young man smiles back, but withdraws his stare a second later. Mel continues to look at him, but after a moment does the same as the other.

- Your countenance is like this picture. - Mel mentions about Ratree, who looks at him a bit confused. - Hopeful and hopeless. - Ratree is surprised, but sees that Mel is still looking ahead, so he does the same and in the distance there is a clear sky with the intense colors of the sunset, which contrasts with the sky above them that is opaque and from which an abundant rain falls. Ratree sighs and smiles with disappointment.

- So, maybe I'm too obvious. - Ratree expresses in disillusionment. Mel looks at him, grabs his shoulder and gives him a smiling expression.

- Do you think so? - Both boys stare at each other, not knowing what else to say.

- Toby, don't go! - A local boy shouts. Ratree turns to look, followed by Mel. They see a small black dog jump onto the tracks and the little kid chases after it. Ratree gets up quickly and worried because cars and motorcycles are speeding by.

In the middle of the road, the infant grabs the little dog in his arms. He sees a car coming at full speed towards him. The lights illuminate him and he makes a face of complete terror. Inside the vehicle, a dashboard near the gearbox shows the boy and the dog in infrared light, which begins to flicker.

Ratree runs and gets in front of the little kid and the animal, his back to the car. He takes them in his arms and tries to go, rather jump, to the sidewalk with them, but the glare of the automobile's lights is right behind him. He turns his head slightly and his pupils become smaller. Visions invade his mind again, sheets from a hospital bed and green liquid dribbled on them; a hand covers his mouth tightly and there are faint, faltering moans; flashes and glimpses of operating room lights.

Jia, on the terrace of the Fineish restaurant, and Claes, at the Andromeda bowling club, startle a little. Jia drops the fork with which she eats and Claes subtly misses a bowling ball. However, beyond mistaking what they are doing, it is their inner selves that are shaken. Claes looks at his companions in the club and smiles at them in embarrassment. Then he looks away and his expression changes to one of strangeness, as does that of Jia, who dines with her grandparents.

For his part, Ratree falls to the ground together with the boy and the dog, splashing some water. He holds them both, animal and infant, and breathes incontinuously, although he tries to pull himself together as quickly as possible. He places his hand on the ground to raise himself somewhat and turns to look at the car that is just behind him a few centimeters away, completely stopped and from which a translucent blue barrier is coming out. People on the sidewalks look on in amazement. Mel reaches out to them and helps lift the little boy up with the canine. Then, he gives Ratree his hand to help him to his feet.

The glass in the front right window of the vehicle is lowered and a gray-haired old man watches them. - Are you all right? - He asks. Both young men look at each other, examine the kid, and finally nod to the adult, who nods back, rolls up the glass, and starts the car on its way. Mel approaches the child and bends his knees.

- Do you know how dangerous that was? - The boy questions the infant in an admonishing tone. A bracelet on Ratree's left wrist vibrates and emits a

faint ringing sound. He raises his arm and sees the wristband, though he quickly begins to detail the MABIS symbol on it.

- But Toby jumped in. I couldn't leave him there alone. - The little one expresses, on the verge of tears.

- It's all right. It's all right. Don't worry about it. Nothing bad happened. - Mel starts rubbing his shoulder in an attempt to stop him from crying and succeeds. Ratree continues to look at the mark that was made on him earlier that day. Bracelet and symbol blink. He sighs and presses a button on the device. On the holographic screen that pops up there is text: "JiaZZZ [AND] ClaLooong". He sees the text and the device continues to beep.

A muscular man, with a grumpy expression and a little wet from the rain, comes to them at a light jog. He grips the kid's hand firmly. On his left wrist, the MABIS symbol glows red and he addresses both boys. - Sorry for putting you in this situation. I stop looking for a second and this happens. - The gentleman gives the infant a disapproving look, for which he turns his eyes away in shame. The guardian of the child raises his eyebrows and shows a more relaxed expression. - Thank you very much - The adult thanks Mel and Ratree, who nod in agreement. The three of them, man, kid and dog, leave. The boys go to the sidewalk.

The ringing of the bracelet still continues, so he looks back at the holographic screen and gives it a little tap. - Ratree! - Jia's uneasy voice is heard over the intercom.

- Ratree? - Now Claes' with concern. Ratree smiles slightly. Mel watches him, almost analyzing him.

- I'm fine. - The boy exclaims to his bondmates.

- Oh my goodness, what anguish! - Jia exclaims.

- Glad to hear it, Ratree. What happened? - Claes probes his friend. Ratree looks at Mel and gives him a smiling nod.

- I'll tell y'all about it tomorrow. We'll talk later. -

- Okay, but take care of yourself, dear. -

- I hope everything's okay. Talk to you later, Ratree. -

The holography fades. The boys are dampened superficially by the now light rain. - What's your name, by the way? - Mel consults his new, it seems, friend.

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- First day with MABIS and already on the nerves. - Jia tells her grandparents Momo and Yarin, with whom she has a pleasant dinner on the covered terrace of the Fineish restaurant. The roof is transparent and the drops of the now drizzling rain slowly slide on it. Inside, there are circular tables covered with black tablecloths and golden candles. The place provides a prim atmosphere and music for refined ears. In front of Jia and her relatives

there is a small banquet, but it looks exquisite. The girl notices the MABIS symbol on her left wrist, for which she sighs. - I'll have to get used to it. - She mentions more to herself than to her grandparents. Momo, her grandmother, gives her a vacant smile. Then she looks at Yarin, the grandfather. He looks back at her and, right after, they both focus their gaze on Jia.

- Jia, we have a favor to ask you. - Momo communicates to her granddaughter, who makes a confused gesture.

- Perhaps you know. We rebels of the three nations have been estranged for some time now. - Yarin mentions in a soft tone and low volume. The girl looks at her surroundings with caution and a bit of concern.

- I don't think it's the place to talk about this. - Jia tells them with a grimace of annoyance.

- You'd ignore our words if we talked to you about this at home. Besides, it's nothing complicated or risky. - Yarin continues to try to convince her. Jia looks away and makes a disapproving gesture with her lips. - I know you don't like to help us in this, but listen to me, please, for your parents. - Her gaze wanders as she hears these words, but she instantly comes back to reality and looks at Yarin. She raises her eyebrows as a signal for him to explain what she should do. - We want to forge a good bond with those of the other nations again, though we have a problem. Some here don't want to do it. -

- Why? - Jia asks.

- They're more radical and that's why we have split up. We need to warn our allies in Neptune and pass important information to them, information that we can't pass by any other means than physical ones. - Momo explains to the girl.

- And what's the information about? -

- I don't think you want to get involved with it directly. - Yarin asserts haughtily about something they themselves are imposing on the young girl. Jia sighs to let go of the irritation at these cocky attitudes as she closes her eyes. Then she opens them and settles back in her seat. She does not look her grandparents in the eye.

- What do I gotta do? - Jia asks in the softest tone she can muster in this stressful situation. Yarin presses the central button of a bracelet on his left wrist, from which a screen is projected. A picture, as if from a state document, of Gunnar Bonnat, uniformed, well-built, blue-eyed, brown-haired, equally handsome, and with a tattoo of knives on his neck, appears on the screen.

- He's Gunnar Bonnat, Galatea's military officer, and one of our allies. - Yarin explains.

- Are there any rebels...? - Jia almost shouts, but stops her dialogue in its tracks. Without moving her head, she looks to the sides. Then she clears her throat. - ... in the Neptune army? -

- There are quite a few. - Momo says. Jia is speechless. She looks at Yarin and Momo dumbfounded. Then, she looks at the image of the rebel soldier.

- He will be at the MABIS party tomorrow. You just have to give him a chip. - Yarin finishes with the supposedly simple mission that Jia must fulfill.



# CHAPTER 5: REBEL LIVES

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## **JULY 02, 2323, NEREID, NEPTUNE NATION**

The city streets are dirty and disorganized. Its buildings have a mix of futuristic, High Tech, Art Deco and Chinese architecture. Individuals walk in and out of stores, bars and brothels with neon signs. Others walk, talk and smoke. Stray animals such as dogs, cats and rats sleep and wander around.

The sunrise bathes the transport capsules that arrive and leave, dropping passengers off and picking them up, in a bright orange. One of these lands and several people step outside. Hiromi is one of them. In the middle of the crowd and as soon as he gets out, Solari looks around. Then, he turns his eyes to the right side where he sees the sun just making its appearance in the middle of the mountains.

- I should've stopped in Sao and left a rose on her grave. - The exmercenary muses to himself. His brown eyes turn honey as he appreciates the scene in which he is immersed for a brief moment until he comes out of his ecstasy as he is subtly pushed by someone from the influx of passengers exiting the capsule. He turns to look, but everyone walks on as if nothing. Then he sighs, looks at the city and starts walking in the opposite direction of dawn.

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## **TRITON, NEPTUNE NATION**

The huge gardens of Rigel Academy are decorated with flowers of different colors. The backyards have several of cool hues and a statue of the Greek goddess Nike stands there with several lanterns around it. The front and main garden is surrounded by red flowers of various types and has a crystal fountain in the very center. These natural spaces embellish the imposing building in the middle of them. This structure is provided with some pillars and obelisks, as well as gigantic windows with triangular patterns.

Zorine is standing with her erect pose near the crystal fountain in the central garden. From a ring on her left hand, a holographic screen is projected, through which she reviews an architectural plan with the layout of a construction, the one behind her. With great concentration, Morel places her fingers on the holography to zoom in. However, she hears footsteps and, due to her keen instinct, turns to look immediately.

Gunnar is in the distance and is approaching the soldier at a comfortable pace. He smiles at her and Morel does the same. - Gunnar, great to see you!

- Bonnat smiles at her as he continues to move closer to her. Zorine presses her ring and the screen hides. She looks at the knife tattoo on the boy's neck.  
- Oh! New tattoo? -

- Yeah, I don't know why out of the blue I felt like getting it. - Gunnar mentions with a smiling expression. - What do you think of it? -

- It makes you look more... - The girl's gaze falls on the sharp points of those little knives. - ...indomitable. - Both soldiers laugh subtly. - How's everything in Galatea, the military city has got you bored? - Zorine asks.

- Yes, a little bit. The most interesting combats were the ones I had with you. -

- Oh, yeah? So you still haven't gotten stronger than me? What a shame, and me wanting to fight. - Morel moves her lips and head in denial, an action that is replied by Bonnat.

- I was before you left. - The military woman raises her eyebrows and puts her body in fighting position.

- Shall we try? - The girl's gaze is playful, yet has an underlying ferocity. Gunnar nods and smiles. He too strikes a battle stance. Zorine initiates the confrontation and lands the first punch that goes straight for the face, but the boy's forearms stop it. Then, he throws a blow and it is dodged by his opponent. She tries to hit him in the ribs, but Bonnat again blocks the woman's maneuvers with his arm, pushes her and spins with power to land a hook.

The female soldier ducks and jumps at him, grabbing him around the waist. They both fall to the ground, she on top of him. Zorine throws a couple more punches towards Gunnar's face. He avoids them and they hit the ground with quite a bit of power. In one of these, the fighter grabs her fist. With her other hand, Morel tries to punch her opponent, but he manages to hold her down. They both exert force. However, neither manages to subdue the other.

- Be careful at the party. I can't be watching your back all the time. - The man with the tattoo of knives smiles and nods. She does too and begins to dominate her rival. The boy's hands collide against the ground under the momentum of Zorine's fists. She frees herself and places her elbow on Bonnat's neck. - Looks like you're not stronger yet, my friend. - She smiles and he rolls his eyes, arching his eyebrows.

Zorine stands up and holds out her hand to Gunnar. He takes it and she helps him up. Instantly, the girl averts her gaze and stares at someone in the distance. With her head, she indicates to Gunnar about the person far away and he turns to look. Towards them comes Risto Frank, massive, bloodthirsty-looking and wearing a grayish uniform with red and orange details. He is the main envoy of General Sokoli.

- Morel, Bonnat, what's up? - Risto greets them in a dry tone.
- Good morning, Frank. - Zorine returns his greeting.
- What's up, Frank? - Gunnar does the same.

Risto reaches them and stares at Bonnat for a brief moment. He gives him a hint of a smile, but the newcomer's serious countenance does not change. Then he starts walking towards the entrance of the academy. - Morel, I'll see you inside. - The soldier says, turning to Zorine, but continuing on his way to the building. She nods to him and sighs. A notification beep sounds on the girl's ring and a small light flickers there. The military woman presses it and a screen with a message is projected. Her partner watches her and she lets out a pleased gesture as she reads the text. Then she looks at Gunnar.

- Sarah's coming to the party. -

- Sarah? Our bondmate? - The young man's voice lets out a rather cheerful smile and Zorine nods. - Why? - The soldier asks.

- She seems to be a special guest, representing MOTHER. She was told that I was going to be the head of internal security and she just texted me. -

- Is she related to the military? - Gunnar asks in mild bewilderment.

- Not exactly, but you know. MOTHER has a lot of influence in Neptune. Still, it's no secret that I'll be in charge. - She mentions this reassuringly. - Besides, it's Sarah. You know we can trust her. - These words make the boy raise his eyebrows with a start.

- No, no, yes, I know we can rely on her. I've always thought so, but I just found it a little weird that she had that information. - Bonnat says a little embarrassed.

- You know Sarah. She can find out anything. - Both soldiers smile. Then Zorine looks and points with her head towards the academy. - What's going on with Frank? I get the impression that he doesn't like you very much. -

- As I told you, no one in Galatea has your combat ability and I always beat him in proficiency training. I think that's why. - Gunnar expresses in a lightly pretentious way, although without being too conceited due to the honesty and simplicity that characterize him.

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As night falls, Sarah, with her regular elegant bearing and wearing a stunning dark red dress, walks slowly and carefully along a small stone path that leads to the main building of the Rigel Academy. As she moves along, she looks at the crystal fountain in the center of the garden. Then she turns to stare at the immense structure that stands before her. The door is open and Sarah enters through it. Shortly after entering, the woman stops at some beautiful red flowers with orange fragments, which are placed on marble vases hanging harmoniously from the ceiling. She feels the flowers and caresses them.

- What beautiful flowers - She says to herself.

- No more beautiful than you - Gunnar's voice coming from outside the entrance takes Sarah by surprise, who immediately turns to look and upon seeing her bondmate smiles at him with the most affectionate expression.

- Gunnar! How nice to see you! I thought you were in Galatea. How has the training been going? Did Zorine tell you I was coming? - Sarah comes up to him and gets there just before the exit.

- The training in Galatea has been good and yes, Zorine told me about your coming. - The soldier answers with the most serene face.

- And I imagine you're here as part of security to keep an eye out for insurgents or other threats, aren't you? - Sarah affirms and interrogates in equal parts, which startles the rebel soldier.

- Yes, I'll be monitoring to make sure there's no danger. - The boy is partly lying, as his main goal is to pick up the chip Jia has for him. - But since I'll be inside, I'll also enjoy the party, just like you. -

- I'm glad. - Sarah turns to look around, examining the place. - Don't you feel it's a little early? -

- Do you think so? - Bonnat returns the question and they laugh just a bit. Later, Sarah heads over to the flowers she was appreciating a moment ago and caresses them again.

- And how has your stay in the military city been? Have you had to go much elsewhere to deal with rebels? I've heard there are many here in Neptune. - The woman questions, but lacks any accusatory or pernicious tone.

- Ah, not really. It's been calmer than I expected. - He again makes up another lie, as the army has had multiple clashes with anti-system, but they have not escalated thanks to the same infiltrators within the force. Sarah shows an affable expression, although inside she doubts her precious friend's words. Zorine arrives behind Gunnar.

- I see you're already here. As always, earlier than usual. - Morel says to her bondmate.

- I'm pleased to see you, Zorine. - Sarah also looks at Bonnat. - Both of you, it's lovely to see you again, the three of us together, like a few years ago when we were preparing for the MABIS connection. - The trio smiles and the atmosphere is one of esteem and affection.

- The guests will start arriving shortly. Enjoy the party, Sarah. - Zorine invites her friend. - Gunnar and I must leave to focus on security. - Sarah nods to them and they leave. The lady in the red dress continues to contemplate the decorations and the beautiful flowers.

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## **NEREID, NEPTUNE NATION**

Immersed in red and green lights both inside and outside, the Achte Sonne nightclub rumbles with loud electronic music. A large crowd of people dance. Some of them have wrist bands covering their wrists and others have them uncovered, on which the MABIS symbol glows differently for each person, some in blue, some in red and a final few in purple.

In the backyard on the lower floor and sitting on a long bench attached to the wall, Hiromi watches the people dancing wildly. Next to him there is a table and from there he grabs a beverage. He drinks slowly and then gets up. He walks around the place and ahead of him he sees that on a large platform several strippers, men and women, perform provocative dances and movements.

The man's view is captured by one of these performers, by Jabuik, a sensual, good-looking and, at the same time, delicate boy with a tiny teardrop tattoo next to his left eye. He has long bands that cover his wrists completely. The young man notices Solari's gaze and smiles at him.

Hiromi walks over to the edge of the platform. Jabuik does so too and strokes the chin of the former mercenary, who holds the boy's left forearm gently, moves the band upwards and sees that on the wrist he has the MABIS symbol, which is illuminated by a purple light. This act is done by Solari, perhaps, to make sure that the stripper is of age, which in this new world is to be connected to the system, or maybe to make sure that he is an insurgent just like him, although how would Jabuik be if Hiromi has not yet given any simulation chip to the Neptune rebels? Finally, both men smile at each other and the younger one takes the older one's hands.

On the third-floor terrace of this same club, soothing music envelops the place. There are circular tables and the seated people talk while drinking in moderation. Mathis, a burly, tough-looking guy in a leather jacket, is seated, his forearms resting on a bar. He drinks from a glass tumbler while gazing intently at a television set in front of him. There he watches a couple of reporters talking about the Re-unioM party, which is being held at Rigel Academy.

Ther, an angelic-faced girl with medium-short hair and a yellow blouse, comes up to Mathis and hugs him from behind. He comes out of his rapt attention, looks at his girlfriend, smiles at her and kisses her tenderly, breaking down his tough-guy image. The girl looks up at the screen, which her lover also does. On the TV, several fireworks are shown burning in the sky in spectacular fashion, perhaps an omen for the future.

# CHAPTER 6: THE GREAT RE-UNION PARTY

**JULY 02, 2323, TRITON, NEPTUNE NATION**

The hallway of the main building of Rigel Academy is filled with dim warm lights and covered with various floral arrangements of red and orange flowers. People in various suits and dresses are entering through the door of the facility. They walk in trios, each with their bondmates. Thus, Claes, Ratree and Jia arrive there. They go to the other end where there is a large entrance with an archway at the top. This opening leads them into the communal hall. As they walk through it, Ratree stares in amazement at the curvature of wood with carved circular shapes.

Once they enter this new place, it seems majestic, as it is quite spacious. It also has flowers and decorations of various colors, as well as white lights that flood it. At the back of the room, there is a small platform on which lies an atrium and three poles in red, purple and blue respectively, each with the MABIS symbol. Triangular tables surround the area. The ones next to the platform are huge and very wide. On top of them rest delicious and colorful buffet-like banquets.

Already seated near a table with an orange tablecloth, Sarah observes the people who are arriving. Next to her, there is a small statuette of a red-robed woman in a victory pose, holding a sign that reads: M.O.T.H.E.R. Just as when everyone entered, the guests are arranged in threes and conversing. Ramphy, Rigel's director, a little haggard and in a smart suit, walks up to the stage and positions himself in the atrium. He grabs a microphone and clears his throat.

- To all present, a warm welcome. I know you've already had the tedious speech in your schools. So, it only remains for me to tell you to enjoy yourselves a lot. MABIS is now with you. - The gentleman expresses. Some of the newly connected smile and others laugh a little. Electronic music starts to play. The white lighting turns various colors. In the middle of the crowd, Jia, Ratree and Claes look at each other.

- Okay, guys, see you later. Make sure you have fun. - Jia suggests to her friends and they nod. Each takes his own course through the party. Claes sees Devdany in the distance, a reckless woman with an unflappable air. Some people talk to her, but they soon leave, so the boy approaches her.

- Devdany Gowon, the JWB reporter? - The young man asks the lady.

- That's right - Devdany replies.
- May I have a word with you? -
- That's what I'm here for. - Claes smiles at this answer.

For his part, Ratree strolls over and observes some people dancing in a circle. There he sees Mel, which impresses him a little and he approaches. The other boy looks at him and also makes a surprised gesture. He gives him a smile, steps out of the circle for a moment and goes towards him.

- Ratree! I didn't know you were coming to Re-unioM. -
- I didn't know you were coming either. -

- I think we missed discussing a couple of other things. - Both youths smile at each other again. Mel crosses his left arm with Ratree's right and hooks him up to the dance. The boy doesn't resist, but rather seems delighted. Young boys and girls come in and out of the circle dancing and laughing. Then, they hold hands and start gyrating to the music.

Jia, on the other hand, wanders around and looks at her surroundings. As she walks, some boys wink at her and she winks back, but doesn't stop at any of them. She continues on her way. A bit disoriented and passing through people as if she were in a maze, the girl looks to the sides. When she finally emerges from the tangle, she manages to see Gunnar in the distance. He is talking to Sarah, near the table with the statuette of M.O.T.H.E.R. Jia approaches the soldier with confidence.

- Gunnar? - The girl asks. The man turns to look at her and remains silent for a second. Sarah looks at him and Jia bows her head. Bonnat reacts by opening his eyes as if coming to his senses.

- Jia! Sorry, I didn't recognize you. How have you been? - The military man blushes a little and the lady just smiles at him. - I'll talk to you later, Sarah. - The other woman nods politely. Gunnar and Jia head off in another direction while she waves her arm at the MOTHER member in farewell. Afterwards, they both take a seat near one of the large tables with the buffet. Next to it, there is a drinks bar with various liquors, glasses and tumblers. On the other side of the bar, young people are drinking a lot. Gunnar looks at the wines and then at Jia. - Since you're just coming of age, I guess you don't know much about alcohol. - Bonnat mentions and Jia hesitates. She does, but in theory she shouldn't. - Then, I'll give you Jyrah wine. - The girl smiles. It's a good choice in her opinion.

- It's a bit weird that being an insurgent you treat me like an innocent kid. - Jia reproaches the boy and he laughs somewhat softly.

- Being a rebel has nothing to do with living in a harmful way. - The soldier admonishes her mildly. He grabs the wine and two glasses. He places them next to Jia and begins to pour as she watches him reflectively. Gunnar fills the glasses halfway, hands one to the girl and raises his own. - A couple of

glasses fine, many, not so much. - Bonnat faintly clinks his glass with Jia's. - Toast -

- Toast - The two adults drink from the glasses. Then Jia stares at the dark reddish liquid, but looks at Gunnar again.

- Why are you a rebel? - The young woman asks, and the man makes a surprised expression.

- I don't know. Maybe for the same reason as you. -

- I am not. - Jia asserts. Gunnar stops drinking and spots her uneasily. - My grandparents are and I'm doing them a favor. Don't worry about it. - The youth calms down, sighs and continues sipping. - Are you one by your own convictions? - She questions him, but he remains thoughtful. Now the girl sighs in frustration. - I don't see the point of damaging a society that's doing well. -

- But it's not perfect. -

- Don't you think it's too idealistic? What society has ever been so? At least MABIS wants to go a step further, a much needed step, not only for the enhancements it gives us, but for everyone.... - Jia stops her monologue for a second and takes a deep breath. - You know what happened to Earth because of the lack of empathy. -

- And you think there aren't morons in high places now who would be willing to destroy everything and let millions die for their own interests? - Gunnar reproves over the girl's words.

- And how can you be so sure? - The woman inquires in a defiant tone.

- Corruption can be smelled for miles and has the scent of the blood of innocents. - The military man guarantees with a slight tear in his voice. Then he lowers his gaze. - Maybe you're right, though. Maybe it is useless to try to finish it off. - His words have a tinge of distress and discouragement.

- Then why insist on destroying it? - Claes asks Devdany as if continuing the conversation between Gunnar and Jia. They both walk around the room without intruding on the dancing spaces.

- Many find it oppressive to have to rely so heavily on the survival of others. I know we've always been dependent on other people, but with MABIS it's very obvious. Plus, everyone has their own personal motives. - Devdany assures the young man. Then, she stops her step and looks him straight in the eyes with a weighty expression. - But the only thing I can assure you, Claes, is that no extreme is good. -

Ramphy, the director, climbs back onto the stage, stands in the atrium and grabs the microphone. - I invite you to come out to the main gardens. We have a couple of things ready for you there. -

Jia listens to these words and in one gulp finishes her glass of wine. She presses a bracelet on her left wrist and a tiny hatch in the device opens. The



chip, which is tiny, is inside. The young woman grabs it and hands it to the man. He receives it, leaves the glass on the bar, looks at it and, just as Jia did, squeezes a bracelet on his hand. It uncovers a gap, he deposits it there and presses the bracelet again so that the opening closes. Jia nods and rises from her seat.

- Goodbye, soldier. - Jia leaves the guy in a pleasant tone and he raises his drink to reciprocate her farewell. She withdraws and he watches her attentively.

Gathered in the main garden with the red flowers and the crystal fountain, the recent graduates and other guests see that several fireworks are thrown into the sky. As soon as they explode, Ratree's eyes sparkle and Mel, who is at his side, examines him with affection and attachment, but after a moment he looks up at the sky where some trails are left floating, glowing remnants.

More flash powder blows up and the sky now shows the MABIS symbol, those three horizontal lines with three circles above them and below them three triangles touching each other at their ends. Alone in the crowd, Jia gazes at it, that emblem of a new, more empathetic society, or so she wants to convince herself, which she finds difficult after having chatted with the military rebel. She then looks at her left wrist, where she has the mark. She sighs, leaves the place and goes inside.

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Jia enters the spacious hall where she was previously and there are few people inside. The music is soothing. Sarah is also there and sees the girl sitting down, so she approaches her.

- Nice to meet you, I'm Sarah. Sorry Gunnar didn't introduce us. Sometimes he's a bit absent-minded. - The elegant woman says graciously.

- Oh! Nice to meet you, I'm Jia. - Sarah sits down next to the young lady and crosses her legs. They don't look at each other directly.

- If you don't mind, may I know what you gave Gunnar? - The MOTHER member interrogates the newly connected. She opens her eyes wide and watches her with concern, but regains her composure immediately. Silence fills the room, but is soon broken by the chatter of some girls in the distance. One of them, Hally, gives them a sidelong glance, but continues her conversation with the others.

- It was just, just... - Jia's voice exhibits nervousness.

- Yes? - Sarah inquires. Jia rests her fists on her legs, clenches them and looks at them. Her gaze is lost.

- It was just a chip he had requested from me. -

- Mmm, I see. Something rebellious? - Jia's eyes widen so much. Meanwhile, Sarah doesn't look at her. She stares at nothing, with her erect pose and serious look. Noticing this unperturbed attitude, Jia calms down.

- Yes, but I'm not a rebel. - Sarah remains silent, a suspense that forces Jia to speak more. - My grandparents are, and there are simply things I haven't been able to leave in the past. -

- But don't you find any logic in insurgency? - The woman in the red dress asks.

- There may be, but... - Jia is speechless and decides not to talk about it anymore. - You're from MOTHER, aren't you? -

- Yes, I'm in charge of security there. - Jia nods and Sarah smiles at her. The senior woman gets up from her seat and starts walking towards the back of the stage, as there is an exit at the back.

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On the main garden and in the middle of the multitude, Ramphy holds a microphone and brings it close to him. - And now the best part's coming! - He says it in a spirited tone. Small aircrafts sound a little off in the distance. Claes and Devdany, along with the others, turn their heads in the direction of the sound. Three small planes, purple, red and blue respectively, begin to fly overhead. Smoke trails of the color of each begin to emanate from their rear end.

People smile and enliven the atmosphere with some animated clamoring. The planes fly in a circle and the guests spin in their tracks. - Give a big round of applause to yourselves and your bondmates, you're now full citizens with MABIS! - The director exclaims. People begin to applaud. Ratree and Mel do so. Later, the small airplanes descend and land on a nearby runway.

Another aircraft begins to fly overhead. This one has many lights activated and begins to circle in the sky, leaving beautiful trails of light. Everyone watches in amazement. The plane makes a couple of more turns and then descends. It lands near the colorful ones. People clap their hands.

Mel indicates a place for Ratree with his head and the other boy makes a confused expression. The first guy winks at him, takes his forearm and they both leave the gardens.

Jia is inside and alone. Her gaze is lost in the now warm lights that drench the atmosphere.

Zorine walks through the garden where all the crowd is. She stops at the crystal fountain and looks quietly at the surroundings.

Gunnar is moderately far from the academy, sitting on a wooden bench as he looks out over the Triton city. There is no one near him and his frown seems lost in thought.

Sarah, on her side, is in the back gardens. Small, dim, cool lights illuminate the environment. In complete solitude, the woman walks and looks at the flowers of various colors. Then she observes and caresses the statue of the Greek goddess Nike that lies there.

In the main garden, Claes and Devdany move their heads to the sound of the now relaxing music while holding glasses and sipping from them. The three airplanes begin to fly over the site again, leaving colorful traces. However, the purple aircraft separates from the others. At once, Zorine notices this and frowns. She presses a button on the ring on her left hand and squeezes an earpiece in her ear. Then she turns to look at the plane.

- One, two, pilot of the purple aircraft, one, two, pilot of the purple aircraft, can you copy? - The military woman insists over the intercom, but no one gives her an answer. Then she hears a distorted sound that bothers her ears.  
- Pilot? - Zorine repeats.

- Down with MABIS! - Someone on the other side of the sign shouts. Zorine opens her eyes wide and dazed. She presses her ring and a holographic screen pops up. She taps several options on it, but the plane accelerates and fires a missile that heads for the center of the garden towards the guests' position. Finally, the military woman manages to find the indicated button, presses it and a plasma shield begins to emerge from the ground. Some people start to run; others look confused.

Shortly before reaching the ground, the projectile explodes and generates a powerful explosive and expansive wave that hits the plasma shield, destroying it with a little delay. The wave is routed all over the place. It strikes everything and everyone. Individuals fall collapsed and with serious injuries. It also rumbles and destroys part of the formidable main building of the academy. Windows are blown out. Devastation takes over.

# CHAPTER 7: CULPRITS OF THE DISASTER

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## **JULY 03, 2323, NEREID, NEPTUNE NATION**

In the early morning, a bright moon with a faint reddish hue illuminates Jabuik's small, yet comfortable room. In addition to the moonlight, the place is illuminated with some dim yellow and orange spotlights. Hiromi places a few slow, velvety kisses on the boy's neck. However, he stops, raises his gaze, turns it to the window and it is lost in puzzlement for a brief moment. The rebel has a hunch that something is not right even though the atmosphere both inside and outside is calm.

Jabuik strokes his face with his left hand and the exmercenary's attention returns to the young man. His worried face changes expression. He gives a seductive and fresh smile to the dancer. Likewise, he kisses his palm, though his eyes linger on the MABIS symbol underneath that flashes a light purple.

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## **TRITON, NEPTUNE NATION**

On a rooftop of a building on the outskirts of Rigel Academy, Risto Frank watches a videoclip on a screen projecting from a small device, but flinches when he hears a bang at the party site. He rushes to the edge of the terrace and realizes that a monumental explosion is engulfing the main garden. Similarly, a brutal instinct takes hold of him and he notices the purple aircraft fleeing, so he climbs into his plane and begins to follow it.

The military man presses a button on the front panel of his vehicle and the intercom turns on. - Pilot of the purple bird, what happened back there, why are you leaving the place? - Frank inquires, but a distorted popping sound keeps him in suspense. - Pilot? - He asks again, but no one answers and he sighs. - Last warning, I don't want to start a confrontation. - Suddenly and unexpectedly, the escaping airplane turns its direction higher up in the sky and a projectile comes out of it, which takes the path to Risto's ship. - Ah, shit! - The soldier shouts when he sees this and maneuvers to dodge the rocket.

Then, he presses some buttons on his steering wheel and from the cannons of his aircraft an electric wave is released, which impacts severely against the purple airplane and disables it, causing it to fall slowly to the ground. - Don't play with me, idiots. - The young man says to himself. Once

the vehicle that produced the disaster hits the surface, Frank lands and gets out of his ship. He takes out a plasma weapon that he has in a case on his left side and moves with a steady step towards the plane that was buried in the ground.

As soon as he reaches it, his gesture shows disgust. - Damn it - He expresses when he sees that the dome of the small plane is soaked with blood. He shoots straight there and breaks the glass covering the pilot's seat. He notices that the infiltrator blew his brains out not long ago. So, Risto jumps into the aircraft and checks the criminal's left wrist. He realizes that this person is from Jupiter, as his MABIS symbol emits a slight blue light, which perishes in the seconds that follow. The soldier presses a ring on his hand, selects the contact of General Anton Sokoli on the projected screen and clears his throat.

- Sokoli - Risto mentions, but then rolls his eyes as if realizing that he shouldn't talk to his superior like that. - General Sokoli, I have very bad news. - On the other end of the call, a thick voice rasps.

- What happened, Frank? - The army leader asks.

- I don't have all the details, but.... - The soldier's tone deepens as he looks at the fire, smoke and destruction in the gardens. - ... a rebel bombed Re-unioM. -

- What? - Anton yells with great commotion.

- It was one of the planes they used in the show. When it was fleeing, I shot it down, but the bastard inside committed suicide. - The man said, clenching his fists.

- How? Those planes weren't supposed to have any weapons capability. -

- I'm wondering the same Sokoli, and there's something else that doesn't add up. That rebel was from Jupiter, not Neptune, and I'm sure all the party personnel were from here. - Risto declares as he makes his way to the scene of the disaster. Anton clicks his mouth.

- Frank, I want you to concentrate on helping the injured. - The chief commands. - And also, on arresting the Jupiter youths who aren't too badly hurt to take them to Galatea. -

- What? - The perplexed soldier questions. - I didn't say it was the fault of... -

- Those are the orders, officer. - The General imposes to his subordinate, who sighs and nods to himself.

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In the midst of the catastrophe, Claes wakes up and throws aside dirt and some debris from the now shattered crystal fountain. He doesn't have many bruises, by virtue of which he only gets up a little dizzy and with his head throbbing. He sees everything double or triple, diagonal and blurry, so that he loses his balance and falls to his knees. He rests his hand on the floor. He

inhales and exhales slowly to regain his orientation, as he has not yet analyzed what happened. He looks up again and sees somebody shooting at another person, although it is only a hallucination. He shakes his head and sees more clearly, which is not at all encouraging.

Most people are lying on the ground and a lot of blood stains the lawn. Some have charred body parts and multiple limbs are strewn all over the garden. This stark image chills the young man, whose breath catches. His eyes widen even more when he sees Ratree in the distance in a prone position, so he takes off running towards the location of his bondmate. As soon as he reaches him, he turns his body and notices that part of the right side of his face is burned. However, it is not Ratree.

This boy opens his eyes with difficulty and looks at Claes, who holds out a hand for him to sit up. - I'll get help. Just wait a bit. - The aspiring military man assures him in a calm tone. Long rises to his feet and surveys his surroundings. He realizes that close to where he was a moment ago, Devdany is lying on the soil. She wakes up and tries to stand up, but only manages to get her hands to lift her body a little. He goes to the woman and sees that she has a deep wound in her right leg, which is bleeding heavily. Just as he did with the other boy, Claes helps Devdany and assists her to sit up. He then takes off his jacket and ties the sleeves tightly around the injury to stop the bleeding.

- Thank you, Kibo. - The lady reciprocates the favor with little encouragement due to the accident and he is confused.

- Ah, I'm Claes. - He mentions a little meekly and she spreads her eyes, noticing the mistake.

- Claes! Thank you, Claes. - Devdany expresses, retracting her shoulders. - Sorry, it's just that... - The woman examines this desolate environment. - ... I experienced something similar some time ago. - Words to which the young man nods, although his frown quickly shows uneasiness, which is perceived by Devdany, so she takes Long's left forearm and places it in front of his eyes. He observes the MABIS symbol, which is flashing very fast and is lit up in its entirety. - Don't get alarmed. Your mates may have received damage, but they're still alive, otherwise part of the mark wouldn't be illuminated. - Her reasoning brings relief to the boy, who closes his eyes to take a deep breath. When he opens them, his gaze shows determination.

- You're right. While I find them, I'll help the victims. - Claes stands up and his eyes are like a radar scanning the area for survivors and injured. Some others who are also not badly harmed assist and cooperate to aid the others.

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On the other hand, Zorine wakes up. Her instinct and appreciation for her bondmates make her guide her eyes to the left arm, where she sees the

MABIS symbol that gives her signs that her friends are still alive and she sighs comfortingly. She then proceeds to press an earpiece she has and connects to the military intercom network.

- To all military members, help the casualties and capture any Jupiter youths who aren't hurt, as it's suspected that some of them may have been involved in the attack. - General Sokoli's words dictate.

- Why those from Jupiter? - Zorine ponders. Then, the military woman reviews some options on the holographic screen that is projected from her ring, looking for General Winpou's contact, although she sees a private network of Anton and Risto, which makes her strange and enters it without her presence being noticed, since she has the army's system hacked.

- General Sokoli, sorry to insist, but I do not think it's right to imprison the Jupiter people. We don't know what happened and that would also bring us problems with this nation. - The girl listens to Risto through the intercom and is amazed, since she notices clear and empathic reasoning in the soldier.

- We have to start somewhere, Frank. In the absence of information, it's the only thing we can do for the moment. - Anton states with farce, for all soldiers know that this man's intentions always have an oppressive and indecipherable nuance. - Likewise, I want you to search for Gunnar Bonnat and Jupiter's girl Jia Hall, if they're still alive of course, and arrest them. - He orders in a fierce voice. Zorine opens her eyes in stupefaction.

- Bonnat? Why him? - A disoriented Risto asks.

- One of my soldiers inside saw that he received a chip from this girl. This could indicate to us that he was connected with the attack. -

- Not really, Sokoli. - The man defends his partner, even though he doesn't have a bit of sympathy for him.

- If you don't bring him to me, I'll ask someone who's capable. - Anton puts pressure on his subordinate, who sighs.

- All right, I'll do it. -

Zorine disconnects from this network and, focused, looks for another one at full speed, which is that of her bondmate. When she finds it and calls out, he answers at once.

- Gunnar? -

- Zorine? -

- How are you? - They both question each other at the same time.

- I'm helping the victims in the main garden, but I need you to leave immediately. - The military woman demands sharply. The boy, who runs to the scene of the disaster, is a little stunned.

- What? Why? -

- A Sokoli soldier saw the exchange you had with Jia and ordered Risto to capture you. He thinks you had something to do with the attack. You'd better

leave now. You know how Anton is. - She comments to Bonnat, who stops his step and his gaze wanders for a moment. However, it focuses on something in the distance. He notices that near Rigel's imposing main building, a boy is trying to free himself from some debris that is trapping him. It is Ratree. The soldier inhales deeply.

- It'll have to be later, Zorine. There's a guy who needs help now. - Just after saying this, he runs off in the direction of the newly connected. The girl sighs with a hint of frustration.

- Gunnar, assist the boy and take him to the back gardens. See you there.

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- Okay. - The soldier replies as he hurries towards Ratree. Once he arrives, he moves all the concrete ruins that confine the young man and he looks at his rescuer with grateful eyes. The boy is badly injured, his face intact, but the rest of his body has numerous lacerations, so the military officer gently grabs him by the hips and arranges him in a more convenient position for such a number of bruises.

Ratree is a bit out of it, although his perception recovers instantly. He begins to look around as if searching for someone. Gunnar watches him in confusion. As soon as he sees something, the boy freezes. Nevertheless, despite his wounds, he starts to crawl forward and tries to remove some debris. The soldier approaches him and collaborates. When they clear away several, they spot a pretty battered and disfigured body, evidently lifeless. That is, or was, Mel. Ratree's eyes are invaded by tears of grief, grief that he cannot externalize as intensely as he would wish. That poor face is a fountain of water of great restrained despair. Bonnat feels sorry for him and moves his lips with regret.

The soldier walks over to the corpse and checks its left wrist to make sure of its condition. Indeed, the MABIS mark no longer glows even a little. So, he lays it gently on the floor and looks at Ratree, who does not gesture any words and does not make any noise. The boy also looks back at him and begins to wobble. He falls fainting to the ground due to the body blows, but Gunnar manages to avoid the impact against the surface, placing his hand on the chest of the badly wounded. He then carries him in his arms and heads for the back gardens.